

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Education Committee
March 16, 2009

**TESTIMONY OF
MARK K. MCQUILLAN, COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION**

ON

RAISED BILL 6666

AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHER CERTIFICATION

The Department of Education supports in part and opposes in part the proposals in Raised Bill 6666.

First, while the Department generally supports the idea of providing flexibility for potential teachers who seek certification in a subject shortage area, we are not certain that the proposal in section 1 of this bill is feasible. Section 1 of this bill proposes allowing applicants that are interested in teaching a subject shortage area to demonstrate proficiency in that area by scoring an "excellent score," in lieu of meeting the course requirements. The current examination used by the Department to assess subject area competency (Praxis II) is not intended to take the place of coursework in that area. The Educational Testing Service (ETS), which administers the Praxis examination, specifically stated in a 2006 report entitled "Proper Use of the Praxis Series and Related Assessments" that "test scores may not be used for licensure by itself; assessment scores are used to inform licensure decisions." In addition, the National Council for

Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards used to accredit teacher preparation programs will not allow a test to be accepted in lieu of a major.

Consequently, the Department is unsure how either a traditional teacher preparation or an Alternate Route to Certification (ARC) program could adopt the standard proposed in this bill and continue to be approved in our state.

Of note, currently, Connecticut's ARC program does not require that an applicant's bachelor's degree be in the intended teaching field as long as it is in a closely related field. For example, engineering, accounting and finance majors can be eligible to teach in mathematics as long as they have taken a certain amount of mathematics courses.

Second, the Department supports in part the proposal in Section 5 of this bill to allow individuals to teach part-time at an interdistrict magnet school under a new Adjunct Instructor certification. We support adopting this proposal as written for dance instructors. Dance is a course which is offered at very few schools in the state and there are a limited amount of qualified instructors available to teach these courses. However, art, music, and theater are more traditional course offerings and there is a greater abundance of qualified instructors to teach these courses. As such, given that certification routes are available in art, music, and theater, the Department proposes limiting the number of times the Adjunct Instructor certification can be renewed in those three subject areas to three years. This will allow individuals time to get certified as teachers, if they so choose. In addition, the Department believes the proposal should be limited to those interdistrict magnet schools that specialize in teaching the arts.

Third, the Department generally supports the proposal to exempt out-of-state teachers from having to take the Praxis examinations in order to teach in Connecticut. Connecticut continues to have a great need for highly qualified teachers, especially in our urban districts and in specific subject areas. This revision would make it easier for experienced teachers in the surrounding states to consider Connecticut as a potential place of employment. The Department requests that the language in the bill be revised to require that the out-of-state candidate complete at least three years of teaching in the other state in order to waive the testing requirements. In addition, out-of-state candidates interested in teaching elementary or early childhood students should be required to pass the reading test that was recently implemented by the Department for all elementary and early childhood educators.

Fourth, the Department strongly opposes the proposal to require local and regional boards of education to provide behavior analysis services by individuals certified by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) to those students with autism spectrum disorder. BACB is a non-profit corporation that was established to meet professional credentialing needs identified by behavior analysts, governments, and consumers of behavior analysis services. The BACB certification does not ensure that the credentialed provider has had any experience with children, school environments or a person with autism. In fact, the certification may be completely inappropriate to deal with any specific child with autism. The determination of the use of appropriate intervention strategies should be determined by a group of knowledgeable professionals, such as the

district's planning and placement team, as stipulated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Further, the Department has concerns that BACB certification cannot take the place of being properly licensed with the Department of Public Health or certified by the Department of Education. Currently, most related service personnel hired in districts on a part-time or full-time basis are either licensed by the Department of Public Health or certified by the Department of Education. In addition, the availability of BACB certified individuals in Connecticut is quite limited. Currently, there are over 4,000 children in the state in special education with a primary disability category of autism. However, the BACB "certificant registry" shows only 134 credentialed individuals in the entire State of Connecticut. With such a limited pool of candidates, districts will be hard pressed to fulfill the mandate in this bill.

Last, the Department has some concerns about requiring a performance assessment of instructional competency in reading as part of continuing education for teachers but certainly agrees that this is an important area in which teachers need to be well-trained. In addition, the Department is concerned about setting standards to demonstrate proficiency in a subject area or in professional skills for the purpose of awarding continuing education credits for professional educators. Imposing new standards, tests, and assessments on experienced teachers in the middle of their career would be challenging. The Department strongly supports the language in this proposal that requires the training in reading instruction to be scientifically-based.

In summary, the Department of Education supports in part and opposes in part the proposals in Raised Bill 6666.